

RELIGION AND SOCIAL POLICY

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received bequests, let out sheep and cattle, advanced money, made large profits by church ales, and occasionally engaged in trade.¹¹ Membership of the Church and of the State being co-extensive and equally compulsory, the Government used the ecclesiastical organization of the parish for purposes which, in a later age, when the religious, political, and economic aspects of life were disentangled, were to be regarded as secular. The pulpit was the channel through which official information was conveyed to the public and the duty of obedience inculcated. It was to the clergy and the parochial organization that the State turned in coping with pauperism, and down to 1597 collectors for the poor were chosen by the churchwardens in conjunction with the parson.

Where questions of social ethics were concerned, the religious thought of the age was not less conservative than its ecclesiastical organization. Both in their view of religion as embracing all sides of life, and in their theory of the particular social obligations which religion involved, the most representative thinkers of the Church of England had no intention of breaking with traditional doctrines. In the rooted suspicion of economic motives which caused them to damn each fresh manifestation of the spirit of economic enterprise

as a new
form of the sin of covetousness, as in their
insistence
that the criteria of economic relations and
of the social
order were to be sought, not in practical
expediency,
but in truths of which the Church was the
guardian and
the exponent, the utterances of men of
religion in the
reign of Elizabeth, in spite of the revolution
which had
intervened, had more affinity with the
doctrines of the
Schoolmen than with those which were to be
fashionable
after the Restoration.

The oppressions of the tyrannous landlord,
who used
his economic power to drive an unmerciful
bargain,
were the subject of constant denunciation
down to the
Civil War, The exactions of middlemen—"merchants